CHURCH HISTORY

Chapter 44 – The Church in the Early Nineteenth Century

1. Influences on the Church

a. Three external events of major consequence influenced the Church in the nineteenth century: the westward movement, new immigration, and the Civil War

b. The Second Awakening brought many into the Church, but it also promoted the already prevalent trend toward fragmentation. New sects and new branches of established denominations proliferated; and the perennial trend toward apostasy was constantly in evidence. Historic doctrines were watered down, heresy and Modernism crept in, and again the Church seemed dead

2. The Presbyterians

a. By 1802 three presbyteries in Kentucky organized into a Synod; The Plan of Union became of great significance at this time; Under this plan the two churches agreed that it would be permissible for Congregational and Presbyterian settlers in the western country to found churches together, and that a church so organized would be free to call a minister of either denomination

3. The Baptists

a. The Baptist and Methodist churches grew in membership far more rapidly than the Presbyterian and Congregational churches. Ministers in the former could be poorly-educated and serve on a part-time basis; Ministers in the latter had to be well-educated, and were required to give full time to the ministry. It cost less to organize a Baptist or Methodist Church. In addition, these ministers who worked with their hands along with the frontiersmen appealed to them more than the scholarly Presbyterians. Their crude, highly emotional sermons were well-fitted for the rough conditions of life on the frontier; Often the Baptists came as groups and brought their ministers with them

b. It was the custom to hold monthly business meetings. These meetings were generally devoted to matters of discipline for drinking, fighting, stealing, immorality, gambling, and even intimate family relations. South of the Ohio River, where many church members held slaves, the church watched protecting over the slaves. Slaves could be church members, and they were sometimes permitted a voice in church matters. It is clear that the Baptist Church was a powerful factor in maintaining order and decency in the raw western communities

4. The Methodists

a. Of all the churches, the Methodist was the most successful in extending itself among the frontiersmen in the new western country; Their greater measure of success in winning men and gathering them into churches was due to two things: their doctrine and their organization

b. The Methodists were Arminians. They preached the doctrine of man's free will — that man holds his destiny in his own hands. This doctrine had great appeal. The frontiersman felt that he was carving his own destiny out of the western wilderness. The form of organization of the Methodists was also better suited to frontier conditions

5. A Second Awakening Begins in the East

a. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, the Great Awakening in America was followed by a sharp decline in spiritual life. This was in part the result of the English Deism and French Skepticism, both of which had a deep and widespread influence on the people. Many of the leading men in America were Deists. Perhaps the most influential of these was Thomas Paine, who in a pamphlet entitled The Age of Reason *boldly swept the Christian faith aside*

b. The last years of the eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth marked the lowest level of vitality in the history of the Christian Church in America. In the new western country the great mass of frontiersmen were sunk in religious ignorance. Quarreling, fighting, hard drinking, and the most shocking profanity were the order of the day

c. In 1795 Timothy Dwight became president of Yale. He was a grandson of the great preacher Jonathan Edwards. In a series of lectures and sermons in the college chapel Dwight showed the dangers and evils of Deism, infidelity, and materialism. A revival started in 1802, and one third of the students were converted. Dartmouth, Amherst, Williams, and the College of New Jersey experienced similar revivals.

6. Revivals and Camp Meetings

a. In the new West the revivals took an altogether different course. One of the early leaders there was a Presbyterian minister by the name of James McGready

b. Camp meetings were held in every section of the West. Especially at night they were a great sight. Campfires blazed; there were long rows of tents; in the trees hung hundreds of lamps and lanterns. The preachers engaged in impassioned exhortations and earnest prayers. Swelling notes of music floated on the night air as the thousands joined in the singing of hymns

7. New Denominations

a. Three groups left the Presbyterian Church. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church *was organized by those who advocated the camp meeting, the circuit system, and a greatly weakened Calvinism. The* Christian Church *left because it could not wholeheartedly accept election and predestination. The* Church of the Disciples *started as a protest movement against all the divisions in the church and a desire to return to the simplicity of New Testament times. Groups also left the Methodist Church. The* Methodist Protestant Church *was formed by those who wanted greater democracy and lay participation. The* Church of the United Brethren Christ *and the* Evangelical Church *were organized by German preachers.*

8. Missionary Societies

a. The new religious zeal aroused by the revivals led to the formation of many missionary societies, the publication of many missionary magazines, and the establishment of many Christian colleges and theological seminaries; the Congregationalists formed the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810 which sent out 694 missionaries in thirty years; Particularly dramatic was the beginning of foreign missions among the Baptists. Luther Rice and Adoniram Judson were sent out by the Congregationalists to India. En-route they became convinced of Baptist principles and were rebaptized in Calcutta. Judson remained to work in Burma, but Rice returned to organize Baptist missionary societies.

b. The frontiersmen were for the most part without Bibles and religious literature. To supply this want the American Bible Society was founded in 1816 and the American Tract Society in 1825

9. The Sunday School

a. Back in the colonial period there were no Sunday schools. The Methodists were the ones who brought to the United States this appealing way of instructing the children and young people; In 1824 the American Sunday School Union was organized. The purpose of the Union was to promote the establishment of Sunday schools, and to publish manuals for use in the Sunday schools.

10. Seminaries and Colleges

a. The Congregationalists, whose ministers had been receiving their training at Harvard, established Andover Seminary in 1808, after a Unitarian had been appointed theological professor at Harvard; The Dutch Reformed in 1810 founded a seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey; In 1812 the Presbyterians founded their seminary in Princeton, New Jersey. Between 1808 and 1840 at least twenty-five such schools were founded. They were all located in the East.